



Before the Gathering

Appropriate for use with older and more knowledgeable girls, such as those who have a strong Jewish day school background.

Add to your preparations:

ASSEMBLE MATERIALS

Special Supplies for This Month

- Simple prop and costuming supplies, such as scarves or hats, a *tallit*, a book of Talmud.

COPY HANDOUTS

One copy per participant:

- *Wonderful Woman: Hannah Rachel Werbemacher*

One copy per group, cut into six:

- *"Hannah Rachel: This is Your Life"* cards

REVIEW

FACILITATOR'S RESOURCE

- *Narrator's Script: "Hannah Rachel, This is Your Life"*



WISDOM



Narrator's Script:

"Hannah Rachel, This is Your Life"

Narrator, before Scene 1:

Our story opens in the small town of Ludomir, Poland, in the early 1800s. We are in the home of Monisch (*pronounced "Mah'-nish"*) and Leah Werbemacher, two pious Jews.

(After each narration, invite the girls who have prepared the next scene to come forward.)

Narrator, before Scene 2:

Our story continues in the Werbemacher home in 1815. It seems as though the rabbi's prediction is about to come true.

Narrator, before Scene 3:

Hannah Rachel has now been in school for four years and is nine years old. She loves nothing more than to study.

Narrator, before Scene 4:

As a teenager, Hannah Rachel had been thrilled to meet a young man who supported her in her passion for studying Jewish texts when the majority of the community thought that it was wrong.

Narrator, before Scene 5:

At the time and place in which Hannah Rachel lived, people who were said to have seen heaven, or been visited by spirits or angels, were respected and honored.

Narrator, before Scene 6:

Hannah Rachel had been sure of her path since she was a little girl.

Narrator, after Scene 6:

It is said that after moving to Palestine, Hannah Rachel could be seen walking to the Western Wall every day with a *tallit* and *tefillin* in hand.

EXPLORE

קולותינו, נחלתנו Nahaloteynu Koloteynu: Our Inheritance, Our Voices

Who's Your Rebbe?

Explain that Judaism has a lot to teach us about leadership, not only through our sacred texts, but also through the way our leaders have lived their lives.

Tell the girls that they will be dramatizing the life of an amazing Jewish woman.

Split the girls into three groups.

 **Distribute two** “Hannah Rachel, This is Your Life” cards to each group.

Give the girls five minutes to **get ready** to **act out** the scene that is written on each card. **Invite** them to create their own dialogue.

Bring the girls back together, facing a space you have designated as the stage.


Read the first narrator's part from the Facilitator's Resource: *Narrator's Script: “Hannah Rachel, This is Your Life”* and **invite** the group that prepared Scene 1 to **come forward and present**.

After the first group has presented, read the second narrator's part and **invite** the group that prepared the next scene to **come forward and present**.

Continue in this fashion until all six scenes have been presented.

Conclude by **reading** the last narrator's part and **soliciting** a round of applause for the actors.

Ask: What strikes you as interesting about Hannah Rachel?

 Why is her story worth telling?

She listened to her inner voice.

She had deep spiritual experiences symbolized by visits from other-worldly spirits.

She did many of the things commonly done by men in the place and time in which she lived, such as study sacred texts and give advice.

What kind of risks did she take?

She told the community about her special gifts and talents and acted upon them.

She studied Jewish texts in an era when women did not often do so.

Facilitator's Tip

If there are not enough roles for every girl in a group, suggest that the girls **invent characters**.

If there are too many roles, suggest that the girls use props or costumes to indicate role changes.



*As a leader, it is important to be able to **access, recognize, and act upon** one's inner voice.*

Leadership requires courage and conviction, especially when one's views are unpopular.

She defied powerful communal leaders.

How do you think people would react to Hannah Rachel today?

She might be treated as a scholar.

Her behavior might not be seen as out of the ordinary.

She might be respected for her gifts.

Some people might be skeptical of her claims of other-worldly experiences.



By listening to our inner voices, we gain the strength we need to take care of ourselves and are more readily able to give to others.




What are the positive and negative consequences of listening to our “true voices”?

Positive: We are true to ourselves. We may effect change. People might learn from us.

Negative: We may be ostracized. Our “true voice” might lead us on a more difficult (if also more fulfilling) path.

Point out that Hannah Rachel listened to her inner voice, and, because she had inner strength, she was able to give to others and challenge the religious establishment (though her challenges, in the end, were not successful).

 **Distribute** the *Wonderful Woman* handout as a “souvenir” of their theater experience.

Point out that *part of being a leader is finding, understanding, and listening to our inner voices*, as these women have done.

Ask: What does the term “inner voice” mean to you?

Point out, if necessary, that other words for “inner voice” might be “*intuition*,” “*conscience*,” or possibly “*insight*” or “*gut feeling*.”

Clarify that, in contrast, “*instinct*” generally refers to the hardwired responses to our environment that we are born with, such as the way we instinctively duck when something comes toward us unexpectedly.

Ask the girls to **describe** times they were aware of their inner voices.

Thank the girls for their thoughtfulness and **conclude** with the

 **Life Lessons.**



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By listening to our inner voices, we gain the strength we need to take care of ourselves and are more readily able to give to others.



"Hannah Rachel, This is Your Life" Cards

Copy on card stock and cut into six cards.

Hannah Rachel, This is Your Life: Scene 1

Monisch* and Leah Werbemacher want to have a child but are unable to conceive. Monisch goes to several rabbis to seek their advice. One of them suggests he get a divorce, but he loves his wife and wants to stay married to her. Finally, one rabbi predicts that Leah will have a child. Monisch promises that if the prediction comes true, he will raise his child to be a Jewish scholar.

**Sidecoaching: pronounced "Mah'-nish."*

Hannah Rachel, This is Your Life: Scene 2

Leah gives birth to a daughter, Hannah Rachel. Leah and her husband, Monisch*, are both thrilled to have a child.

Monisch is worried about what he should do: he promised to raise his child as a Torah scholar, but girls in his community don't go to school. He decides to follow through on his promise.

Hannah begins school, learning sacred Jewish texts, when she is five years old. She is set apart from the boys by a partition.

By the time she is eight years old, she doesn't want to play with her friends or spend time with her parents—she just wants to study.

**Sidecoaching: pronounced "Mah'-nish."*





"Hannah Rachel, This is Your Life Cards," continued

Hannah Rachel, This is Your Life: Scene 3

After Hannah Rachel's mother, Leah, dies when Hannah Rachel is nine, people begin to criticize her father, Monisch,* for allowing Hannah to stay in school.

After several years of being pressured by the community, Monisch goes to the *bet din* (rabbinic court), and asks to be released from his vow. Instead, the rabbis suggest that he find her a husband. Hannah Rachel refuses to marry.

Eventually she finds a boyfriend of her own, a young man who respects her studying. He's a young soldier, and Hannah is in love.**

She makes him a *tallit* and begins to think of her future with him.

**Sidecoaching: pronounced "Mah'-nish."*

***Sidecoaching: You will need to make up a name for him!*

Hannah Rachel, This is Your Life: Scene 4

Hannah Rachel's true love, a soldier,* is forced to leave to complete twenty-five years of mandatory army service.

Distraught that her true love has left town, Hannah goes to visit her mother's grave. She prays and cries there until she falls asleep. Waking up in the middle of the night, she is disoriented and scared. When she tries to find her way home, she catches her shawl on a gravestone, falls, and lies there all night.

She is found in the morning and taken home, where she sleeps for days.

When she wakes up, she tells her father that she had been to heaven and received an extra soul. She gets up, puts on the *tallit* she had put aside for her boyfriend, and begins to pray and study.

**Sidecoaching: The group that presents Scene 3 will have made up a name for the soldier—use the name they offer.*





"Hannah Rachel, This is Your Life Cards," continued

Hannah Rachel, This is Your Life: Scene 5

When Hannah is nineteen, her father, Monisch,* dies.

She uses her inheritance to buy a small hut. In the hut she prays and learns, teaches, and gives blessings. She develops a large following of both men and women who call her "rebbe."

This angers the rabbis in the surrounding communities. For them, it's preposterous to think that a woman would study Torah, let alone teach and give blessings. They send her letters threatening both her and her followers and insisting that she stop her work immediately.

Hannah Rachel refuses to stop and instead sends the rabbis letters quoting Jewish law supporting her right to teach.

**Sidecoaching: pronounced "Mah'-nish."*

Hannah Rachel, This is Your Life: Scene 6

In an effort to stop her from teaching once and for all, rabbis from surrounding towns force Hannah Rachel to marry. She agrees, mostly so they'll stop bothering her.

The moment the rabbis leave town, Hannah Rachel throws her husband out.

In response, the rabbis excommunicate her, and she loses most of her followers.

Hannah Rachel moves to Palestine, where she continues to teach and give blessings to a new generation.





Wonderful Women

Hannah Rachel Werbemacher (a.k.a. "The Maid of Ludomir")

Born: 1815, Ludomir, Poland
Life's Work: Rebbe (teacher and spiritual guide)
Known for: Defying the customs of her time to follow her passion

Hannah Rachel's parents had trouble conceiving. Her father vowed that if he ever had a child he would raise him to be a Torah scholar. When his daughter was born, he faced a dilemma. Girls didn't go to school, but he had made a promise. So Hannah Rachel went to school and sat behind a partition to separate her from the boys. By the time she was eight, all she wanted to do was study.

When she was nine, her mother died. After some time, her father asked the *bet din* (rabbinic court) to annul his vow. He was advised, instead, to find her a husband. But Hannah Rachel wasn't interested.

Eventually, she fell in love. But he was a soldier and was soon forced to leave. Heartbroken, Hannah Rachel went to her mother's grave to pray. Eventually she fell asleep. She woke up in the middle of the night and started home but tripped and fell. She lay in the cemetery until morning.

Once home, she slept for days. When she woke up, she said that she had been to heaven and received an extra soul. She got up, put on the *tallit* and *tefillin* she had set aside for her true love, and started to study.

When Hannah Rachel was nineteen, her father died; she recited the mourner's *Kaddish*, then said only by men. She moved into a small hut near the marketplace, where she gave blessings, conducted services, and held classes, attracting large crowds of men and women. Rabbis from across Eastern Europe were distraught that a woman was acting as a rebbe. They pressed her to stop, but she declined, citing arguments from Jewish law.

Ultimately, a *bet din* urged her to marry and to stop preaching and teaching. Wearing by their demands, she agreed to marry; but the moment they left, Hannah Rachel threw her husband out. In response, the court excommunicated her, and she was abandoned by most of her followers.

She immigrated to Palestine and once again assumed the role of a rebbe. There, men and women flocked to her, seeking blessings and learning at her feet. It is told that she could be seen walking toward the Western Wall every day with her *tallit* and *tefillin* in hand.

